

YANKS KITTYHAWK

TO SAY THAT THIS SURPLUS ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE FIGHTER — PURCHASED FOR \$50 — HAS HAD AN UNUSUAL LIFE WOULD BE A DISTINCT UNDERSTATEMENT!

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AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL O'LEARY

Redlands Airport. Except, over six decades ago it was far from a pristine WWII restoration and the Curtiss was launching into a storm-tossed night sky on a most unusual mission!

What follows is the history of a remarkable survivor — an aircraft built during the darkest days of WWII, flown to defend North America, an escapee from the massive post-war scrapings, workhorse for climate

change before that term became fashionable, and, today, a prized flying display in Charles Nichols' Yanks All-American Air Museum. It has been an incredible journey so let's start turning back the pages of history to learn about this fabulous piece of living history.

THE MAPLE LEAF KITTYHAWKS

With the coming of the Second World War, the aerial defenses of Canada were weak at best. With combat raging in the skies of Europe and the Far East, the

Supermarine Spitfires as fast as possible so consideration was given to diverting some of those fighters to the RCAF. There was a problem in the fact that each Spitfire was desperately needed to defend Britain's interests during the dark days of 1939/1940. Plus, there was the threat that cargo ships carrying disassembled Spitfires to Canada could easily become victims of the wolfpacks of German U-Boats crisscrossing the Atlantic and sinking Allied shipping with



Chino Tower, Curtiss P-40 N40425 is ready for takeoff," radioed pilot Chuck Gardner. The date was 11 February 2021 and Chuck was taking the Kittyhawk owned and operated by Yanks Air Museum up for a test flight. The ex-Royal Canadian Air Force fighter had been restored to perfect WWII condition by Frank Wright and his team at Yanks. Pushing the throttle forward, the Joe Yancey-overhauled Allison V-1710 rapidly pulled the

Charles Nichols with the Kittyhawk. "This was the second aircraft acquired for the collection that grew into Yanks All American Air Museum," said Charles. "The plane originally arrived in a whole bunch of pieces and now it is one of the finest flying examples of Curtiss' most famous fighter."

P-40 down the runway and into the hazy Chino sky. Taylor Stevenson was flying the Yanks Texan as a camera platform and we were already airborne and waiting in our designed photo box southwest of the airfield.

Today, any flight by an all-original P-40 airframe should be looked upon as somewhat remarkable but what made this flight especially memorable was that fact that almost 66 years earlier to the day, this very same P-40 was on a takeoff run from nearby

military aviation needs of the vast land mass comprising Canada (some 3,855 million square miles with just 11,500,000 people in 1940) were certainly not foremost in the minds of military planners. However, it became apparent that the Axis did pose a threat to the nation so re-equipment of the Royal Canadian Air Force began to move forward, albeit in a most sluggish manner. It was obvious that Canada needed an upgraded fighter force to patrol its huge coastline but what aircraft would be available during a time when Britain needed every airframe for protection against the growing threat of Nazi domination?

Britain was cranking out

seeming impunity. However, there was another option available to the Canadians.

During May 1940, a small contingent of RCAF officers went to Uplands Airport, near Ottawa, to watch a series of aerial tests between two fighters. They were joined by fellow officers from the Royal Air Force and Army Air Corps and all observed spirited displays flown by a Spitfire Mk. I and an early Curtiss P-40. The Brits, in need of any form of fighter, had ordered P-40s and given these first examples the name Tomahawk while later variants became Kittyhawks. In order to provide Canada with some form of aerial defense — and realizing the P-40 was not suited for RAF service in the hostile skies of Europe — some